DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 919 SO 031 769

AUTHOR	Frese, Millie K., Ed.
TITLE	Orphan Trains in Iowa History.
INSTITUTION	Iowa State Historical Society, Iowa City.
ISSN	ISSN-0278-0208
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	42p.; Theme issue. Published quarterly.
AVAILABLE FROM	State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, IA, 52240-1806 ($3). Tel: 319-335-3916.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Classroom - Learner (051)
JOURNAL CIT	Goldfinch: Iowa History for Young People; v21 n3 Spr 2000
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Education; Fiction; Heritage Education; *Local History; *Modern History; Primary Sources; *Social Problems; *Social Studies; *United States History; *Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS	*Iowa; *Orphan Trains

ABSTRACT

The "Goldfinch" is a magazine that introduces children to different aspects of Iowa history. Each issue contains articles that provide in-depth knowledge of a topic about Iowa. The focus of this issue is orphan trains in Iowa it introduces readers to some of the people heroes of modern history who rode the trains west between 1854 and 1929 in search of better lives than crowded urban streets could offer. Articles in the journal include: "All Aboard! The Orphan Trains Come to Iowa" (Katherine House); "The Amazing Journey of Arthur Field Smith"; "Chosen: The Story of Dorothy Urch" (Susanne Leibold); "Clara Comstock: Attempting the Impossible" (Katherine House); "At Home in Maquoketa: Dorothy Buck" (Susanne Leibold); "A New Hope in Iowa" (Susan Smoots); "Madonna Harms: History Keeper!"; "Iowa's Orphans" (Susanne Leibold); and "How Should We View the Orphan Train Movement?" (Katherine House). The journal also includes excerpts from letters of orphan train riders, an interview with an actress who performs her own interpretation of the story of the orphan trains, and the short story, "Carlo's Journey Home" (Norma T. Balding). (BT)

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Orphan Trains in Iowa History.

The Goldfinch
State Historical Society of Iowa
402 Iowa Avenue
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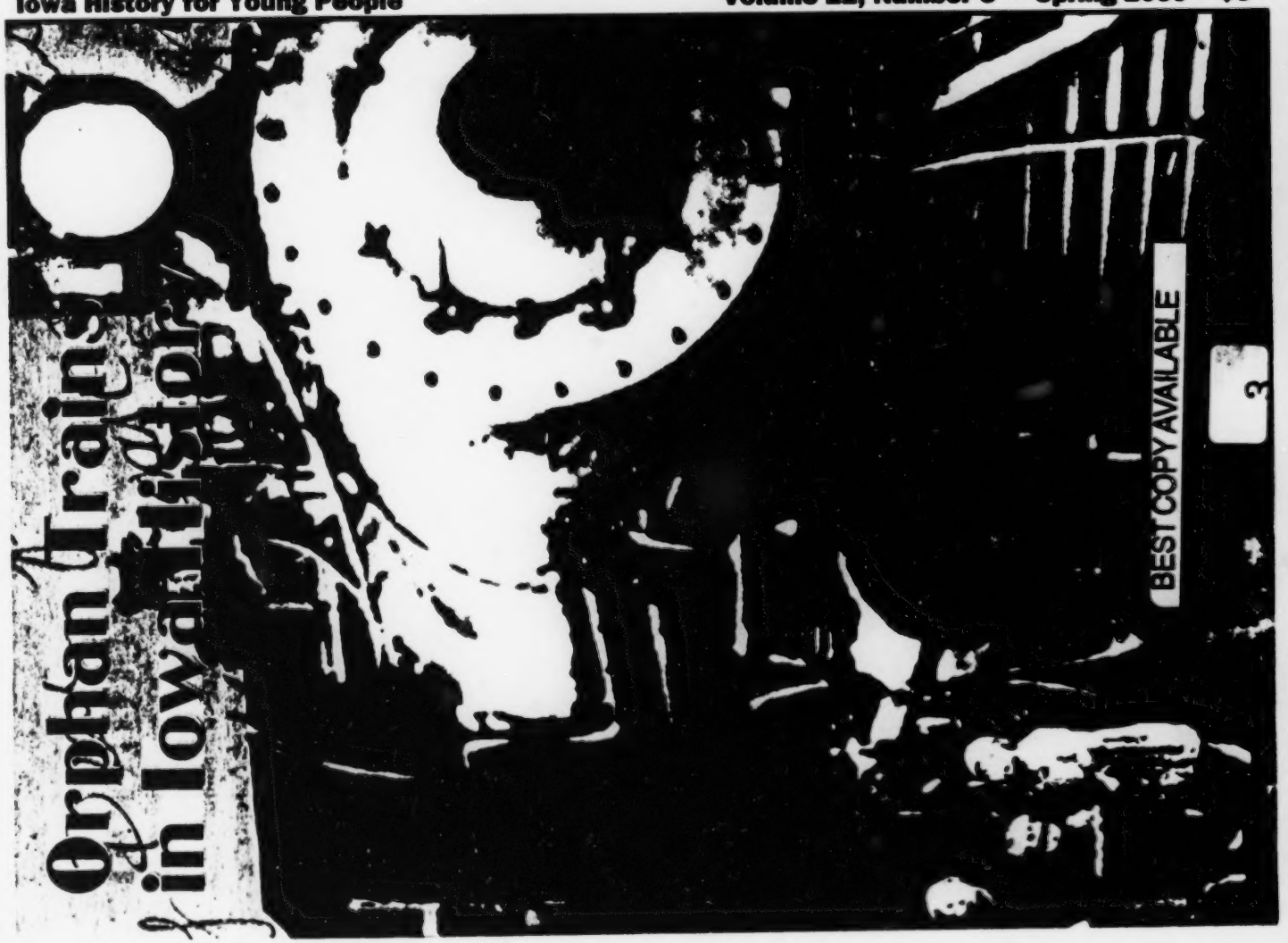
THE Goldfinch

Iowa History for Young People

Volume 21, Number 3 • Spring 2000 • $3



Orphan Trains in Iowa History

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Meet the artists! Marshalltown High School students Melissa Curlee and Amanda Walker created the cover and illustrations for "Carlo's Journey Home" (p. 28).

Dear Readers,

This issue of *The Goldfinch* is your ticket to ride through history on the orphan trains. You'll meet some of the people—heroes of modern history—who rode the trains west between 1854 and 1929 in search of better lives than crowded urban streets could offer. Their lives are the missing pages of American (and Iowa!) history textbooks.

You'll also meet some of the researchers, writers, actors, and artists inspired by orphan train riders' stories. Amanda Walker, 18, and Melissa Curlee, 17, had never illustrated history for publication prior to their assignment for this issue of *The Goldfinch*.

"I didn't know about the orphan trains before," Amanda said. She and Melissa soon found that research was the first step in turning history into art. "It was important to know what the kids went through—what they were thinking, feeling, and doing," Amanda continued. "We had to understand the subject and time period before we could convey it in our work."

Working together is a challenge since art is often an individual effort. "We work differently and have different ideas," Amanda said, "but we looked at the positive parts of each other's ideas and combined them."

Read this issue, then let history inspire you! Produce a play, create artwork, write a story—the possibilities are as endless as your imagination and the wealth of historical resources waiting to be discovered.

—The Editor

THE Goldfinch

Volume 21, Number 3 • Spring 2000

Educational Press Association of America Member

Winner of a 1998 Parents' Choice Silver Honor Award

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The Goldfinch (ISSN 0278-0208) is published by the State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240-1806 (319/335-3916). Second-class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa.

Postmaster: Send address changes to: Carol Carey, subscriptions coordinator, *The Goldfinch*, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240-1806.

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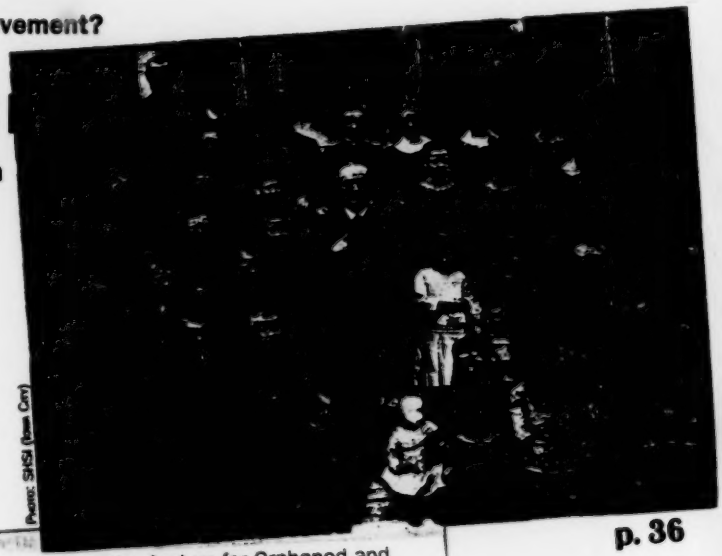

Photo: SHSI (Iowa City)

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A group from the Asylum for Orphaned and Destitute Children in Andrew, Iowa, ca. 1870.

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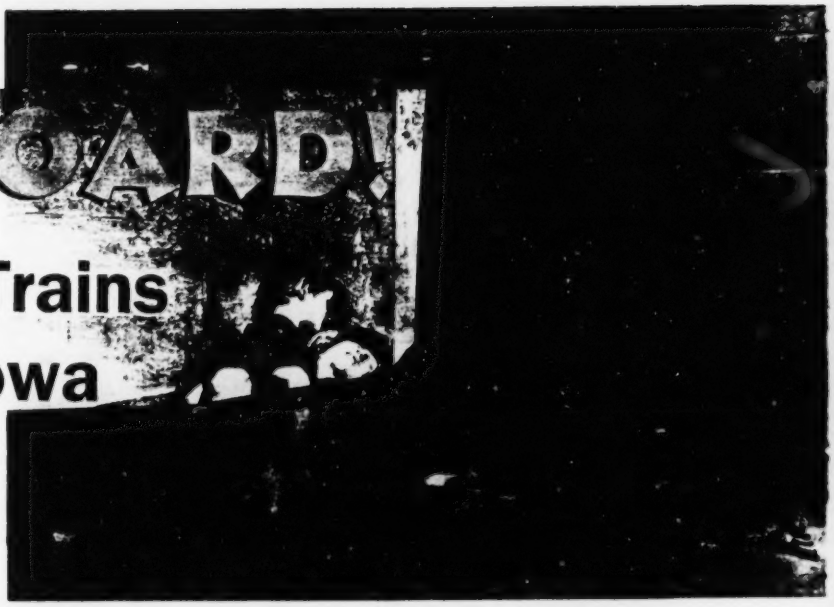
ALL ABOARD!

The Orphan Trains Come to Iowa

By Katherine House



Poor and homeless children roamed the streets of New York City in the mid-1800s. They sold newspapers, matches, and flowers to earn money in the days before school attendance was required. Called "street arabs," they sometimes begged for food or turned to stealing. Homeless children lived in boxes or under stairwells with only rags for clothing. Disease spread quickly through overcrowded areas where new immigrants to the United States lived. Many children died. Those who survived sometimes lost both parents to illness.

The dirty, congested streets of New York City were miles and worlds away from the open prairies of Iowa. So how did conditions in New York affect Iowa history? In the mid-19th century,

Goldie's Timeline: From New York to Iowa

1846

Iowa becomes a state. The 1850 census lists population: 192,000. By 1860, population jumped to 675,000.

The population of New York City in 1850 was 515,547. In 1853, estimates of the number of kids living in the streets ranged from 10,000 to 30,000.

Charles Loring Brace is considered a pioneer in social work. He wasn't the first to try "placing out" to find new homes for orphaned or abandoned kids. His innovation: a system using trains to transport children to homes across the nation.

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vagrant: homeless

This photo of homeless children was taken by Jacob Riis in a Mulberry Street alley in New York City. In 1890, Riis, a journalist, wrote a book called *How the Other Half Lives* describing the plight of orphaned and abandoned children in the city.

Photo: Jacob A. Riis Collection, Museum of the City of New York

charitable organizations began removing poor children from New York City. They were sent to Iowa and other "western" states to live in new homes with total strangers. These emigration or "placing-out" programs were intended to provide homes and families for children while fulfilling the demand for workers on farms.

From the mid-1850s until about 1929, at least 150,000 children were transported west on what became known as "orphan trains." Of those, 8,000–10,000 were sent to Iowa.

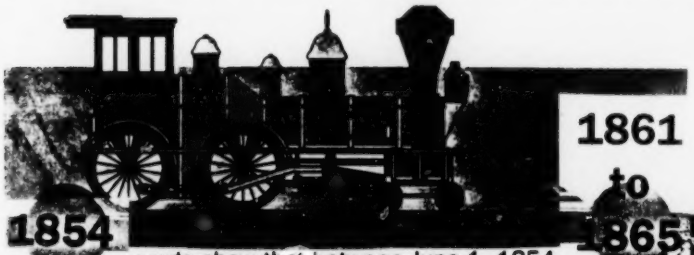
THE BEGINNING OF A PLAN

In 1853, Charles Loring Brace became secretary of The Children's Aid Society. The new organization's goal was to help "a class of **vagrant, destitute**, and criminal children" in the city. Born into a well-off family, Brace attended school to become a minister and spent time working among New York's poorest residents. Working with The Children's Aid Society, he helped establish lodging houses, schools, and other places where boys and girls could get help.

destitute: poor

But more needed to be done. Brace and his workers were not satisfied with the accepted method of assisting homeless and needy children. At the time, these children were often placed in large orphanages, known as asylums. Brace thought children would grow up to be happier and more productive people if they were part of a Christian family. In addition, he realized that it was incredibly expensive to take care of all the needy children in asylums.

In 1872, Brace wrote a book about his work called *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years' Work Among Them*. In it he explained, "The founders of the Children's Aid Society early saw that the best of all Asylums for the outcast child, is the farmer's home." In March 1854, The



1854

Records show that between June 1, 1854 and June 1, 1858, 50 boys, 43 girls, and 26 adults came to Iowa by emigrant trains. The Children's Aid Society and other charities involved in placing out children also helped adults (and sometimes whole families) relocate to western areas, including Iowa, where they could find jobs.

1861 to 1865

During the Civil War, many boys who rode orphan trains to Iowa volunteered to serve in the Union Army—enough to form an entire company! (There were about 100 soldiers in a company.)

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Children's Aid Society gathered the first group of children to be sent west. Forty-six boys and girls aged 7 to 15 were sent by train and boat to southwestern Michigan in search of new homes.

PHOTO: JACOB A. RIIS COLLECTION, MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jacob Riis captured this view of Mullen's Alley in New York City in the late 1880s. Children who couldn't earn a living selling newspapers, matches, or flowers sometimes turned to stealing to survive. If caught, children were jailed the same as adults.

A FRESH START

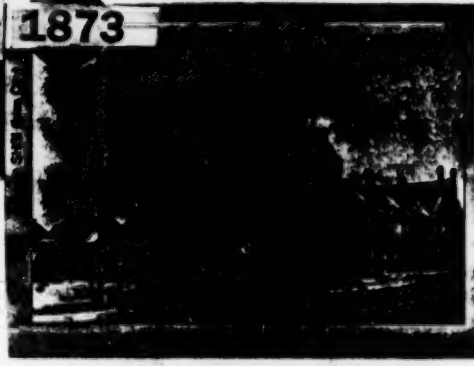
Soon agents from The Children's Aid Society began looking for other farm communities willing to take in needy children. Working with committees of local citizens, they screened applicants who wanted to become foster parents. Newspaper articles and flyers posted around town announced the upcoming arrival of children.

Before leaving for the West, children were bathed and given new clothes. Each group of children selected for placing-out was accompanied by at least one "placing agent," who supervised the children on the trip. After arriving in a selected town, the orphans were displayed before crowds in a hotel, church, town hall, or other public place. Brace wrote, "The farming community having been duly notified, there was usually a dense crowd of people at the station, awaiting the arrival of the youthful travelers. The sight of the little company of the children of misfortune always touched the hearts of a population naturally generous."

1864

The first orphanage in Iowa was built in Andrew. It was called An Asylum for Orphaned and Destitute Children.

Orphan trains stopped in dozens of Iowa towns—including Burlington in 1873 and 1898. Newspapers such as the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* and *Evening Gazette* documented an orphan train's arrival.



1873

1929

The last orphan train carried children west about 1929. The orphan train era represents "missing pages" from American history textbooks. Perhaps because of the stigma once attached to being an orphan, riders didn't talk about their experiences.

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The "distribution" process wasn't as rosy as Brace depicted it, however. D. Bruce Ayler, son of an orphan train rider and webmaster for the Orphan Train Heritage Society of America, Inc. (OTHSA) explains, "Many times the children were inspected like they were livestock. Muscles were felt. Teeth were checked. Sometimes the children would sing or dance trying to attract the attention of new mothers and fathers. It was frightening to have complete strangers looking over them and touching them."

PROBLEMS WITH THE SYSTEM

Sisters and brothers were often separated because most foster families only wanted one child. When possible, brothers and sisters were placed in nearby towns, but some children lost touch with siblings. Sometimes no one in a town wanted a certain child, so the child was put back on a train and sent to the next town. Such rejection was especially painful for children who remembered being given up by their own parents.

Not all the children's difficulties ended when they found a new home. Some children were treated like servants, not members of a family. They were forced to sleep in barns with animals or were given only leftovers to eat. They were teased by other children because they were different and spoke with a New York or foreign accent. Some children ran away to escape horrible conditions. The Children's Aid Society made efforts to check on the children regularly, but the follow-up system was not perfect.

In addition, Brace was criticized for sending Catholic children to non-Catholic families. He thought it was important only to send children to "Christian" homes. In 1873, the New York Foundling Hospital began sending Catholic children west on trains called "Baby Specials." The New York Foundling Hospital, originally called the New York Foundling Asylum, was started by the Sisters of Charity in 1869 to help unwanted babies and young children.

Unlike The Children's Aid Society, the Foundling Hospital worked through local priests

PHOTO: COURTESY M. HARMS

Madonna Harms opened the Iowa Orphan Train Research Center in Rolfe, Iowa.

Goldfinch history detectives tracked down orphan train riders who came to Iowa. Meet several of them in this issue!

1995

PHOTO: S. LEGOLD/SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Dorothy Buck rode to Iowa in 1919. She was one year old at the time.

2000

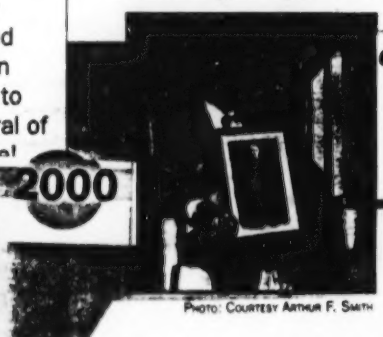

PHOTO: COURTESY ARTHUR F. SMITH

"I was full of apprehension and fear when I got on the train, but once I got over the fear, it was a fun ride."

—Arthur Field Smith

Check It Out!

The next Iowa Orphan Train Riders Reunion will be held September 1-4, 2000, in Estherville. Who's invited? Riders, descendants, and anyone interested in learning more about orphan trains!

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and found Catholic homes for children before they arrived in the West. A letter sent by the Sisters of Charity to Jesse Bell of Mason City said, "We take pleasure in notifying you that the little girl which you so kindly ordered will arrive at Manley, Rock Is. Train on Thurs., June 24.... The name of child, date of birth, and name and address of party to whom child is assigned will be found sewn in the Coat of boys and in the hem of the Dress of girls."

THE RIDERS' LEGACY

The orphan train movement came to an end around 1929. Laws passed in many states restricted or prohibited placement of children from other states, according to the OTHSA. Other ways of assisting poor families were developed.

In its 1917 annual report, The Children's Aid Society bragged about orphan train riders who had grown up to be successful. They included the governors of North Dakota and Alaska, 2 members of Congress, 24 clergymen, 9 members of state legislatures, 19 physicians, 97 teachers, 18 journalists, and many farmers and business owners.

The success of the riders is an important legacy, according to Mary Ellen Johnson, founder and executive director of the OTHSA. She believes everyone can learn a powerful lesson from children who were placed out. "No matter what the bad things are that happen in your life, you can overcome that," she says. The riders are "living proof."

Children's book author Joan Lowery Nixon agrees. Nixon wrote a seven-volume fiction book series called "Orphan Train Adventures" and a four-volume series, "Orphan Train Children." She says, "Children today have much more courage than they think they have." Nixon explains that the orphan train riders show how "kids of yesteryear mustered all this courage and added to this country, and children of the past were the examples children of today could follow."

Today, The Children's Aid Society serves 120,000 children a year in New York City. Its partnership with Boys and Girls Clubs of America extends the society's services nationwide.

Just as important, Nixon believes there is another lesson to be learned from the riders' stories. "I also feel children have the mistaken feeling that history is made by adults," she explains, but orphan train riders show that "children have a strong part in creating history, too." GF

Katie Zittergruen

Imagine being an orphan and riding a train from New York City to the Midwest in search of a new family. Orphan children come to life in books by Joan Lowery Nixon. I've read three of her books.

Will's Choice is about a boy whose father is in a traveling circus. Will's father can't take care of him anymore, so he sends Will on an orphan train. Will was chosen by Dr. and Mrs. Wallace. He helps Dr. Wallace in his office and he assists him on his trips at night when people are sick or hurt. Then one day the traveling circus that his dad is in comes to town. Will he go with his father or stay and help Dr. Wallace? Find out in this exciting book!

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Photo: Jacob A. Riis Collection, Museum of the City of New York

WHO RODE THE ORPHAN TRAINS

Although children who were placed out traveled on "orphan trains," many were not parentless. Some parents had left their children with an institution temporarily, hoping to reclaim them when they turned their lives around. Sick and alcoholic parents simply could not properly care for their families.

In some cases, parents voluntarily "surrendered" or gave up some of their children because they had too many mouths to feed. Embarrassed, unmarried mothers often abandoned babies. Sadly, children who were sent west usually lost all contact with relatives. More boys than girls were placed out, and babies and young girls were most sought after by couples. Jewish children rarely rode the trains; they were usually kept in Jewish orphanages instead. African-American children often ended up in segregated orphanages, although occasionally they were placed out. The Children's Aid Society report in 1875 noted that an African-American boy named Johnny was placed in the Iowa home of an African-American member of a local Baptist church.

Lucy's Wish is about a girl whose mother dies of cholera. Lucy goes west on an orphan train to find a family. The thing she wants most is to have loving parents and a little sister. After being rejected at the first stop, Lucy and her friend, Daisy, both get chosen. Mr. and Mrs. Snapes become Lucy's parents. Mrs. Snapes isn't the mother Lucy hoped she would have. Emma isn't the sister she had hoped for either. Emma is disabled and no one can understand what she says—except Lucy. Read this book and see how Lucy comes to love her new family.

Circle of Love was my favorite book of the three I read. It's about Frances Mary Kelly, an orphan train rider who has found a new life in the West. She leaves her true love, Johnny, to accompany Stefan Gromeche back to New York, her hometown. While she is there, she gets asked to escort 30 orphans to new homes in Missouri. During the trip, they discover that there is a robber riding on the train disguised as a preacher. Will Frances find homes for all of the children? Will she get back to Johnny? You'll find out in this outstanding book!

These books were hard to put down. They are full of adventure and drama. I strongly recommend you read Joan Lowery Nixon's books.

—Katie Zittergruen, 5th grade
Benton Community Schools

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The Amazing Journey of Arthur Field Smith

Arthur (left) and his new brother, Cecil. Arthur was given a new suit for his journey west. "Never before had anyone given me a complete new outfit of clothes," Smith said. Boys were dressed in gray suits with white bow-ties. Girls received shoes and stockings, pretty dresses, and ribbons for their hair. Arthur's new parents kept Field as his middle name and added Smith as his last name. They legally adopted him in 1929.

Arthur Field Smith wasn't supposed to be aboard the train from New York to Clarinda, Iowa, in December 1922. But when one of the girls scheduled to be placed out got the measles, five-year-old Arthur was chosen to go in her place. He was told he'd find a family.

"At the time, I didn't even know what a mommy and daddy were," Smith told *The Goldfinch*. He'd lived in foster homes in New York City until being transferred to the Brace Farm School, operated by The Children's Aid Society, a few days before his train ride to Clarinda.

The train, Smith recalled, was big, noisy, and dirty. "Smoke puffed out of the stack and got on everything!" The children rode with three Children's Aid Society agents in a regular coach—not a luxury sleeping car where they could have stretched out at night.

"We were 12 children who didn't know each other until we got on the train," Smith said. "But we got acquainted quickly and there was always a lot of excitement. We sat in assigned places, and everyone wanted to sit next to a window because there were so many new things to see." Cows, horses, dogs, chickens—Smith had never seen these animals before.

"A few of the older boys boasted that they had seen such animals on the docks in New York City, but it was all new to me," Smith said.

"The three ladies who rode with us—Clara Comstock is the one I remember—took care of us very well. They instructed us along the way about what would happen when we reached our destination."

A large crowd had gathered at the Methodist church for the children's arrival in Clarinda on December 16, 1922. "To us, as we stood before them, it looked like the whole town had turned out for the occasion," he recalled. Worley and Lillian Smith, who farmed north

Photos Courtesy Arthur Field Smith

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of town, were there because they were curious. They hadn't planned on taking a child. But when Arthur climbed onto Worley Smith's lap and asked, "Are you going to be my daddy?" the Smiths took him home to an 8-year-old brother named Cecil and a big, square house on a hill with a porch on two sides.

"At home, they gave me a little bucket and told me to gather eggs. I'd never done that before, but I was proud to do the job!" Smith said. "Once there was a big bull snake coiled in one of the nests. They're generally harmless—but they don't look harmless to a little boy!"

Smith's new mother, who had been a school teacher, couldn't believe he was really 5 years old and ready for kindergarten. "I was undersized, shy, and quiet," Smith explained, "because I hadn't been associated with a family." At first, Smith woke up with nightmares. "I screamed, 'Don't let them take me away from home!' But I adjusted quickly. I was accepted. I never heard a single person mention that I was an orphan."

A month later, on a bitterly cold night, the Smiths were gathered around the kitchen's wood-burning stove when Cecil noticed a thin spiral of smoke escape from a cabinet. "He opened the cabinet and flames leaped out like a hungry tiger," Smith recalled. "That night I watched from a neighbor's dining room window as my first real home burned to the ground."

When Smith was 71, he discovered that he and his 11 companions in 1922 were not the only orphans who traveled by train to find new homes. "We were part of the greatest children's migration known in the history of the world," Smith stated. Newspaper clippings helped him piece together details of his arrival in Clarinda. Now he wanted to learn details of his birth family. His search ended abruptly when The Children's Aid Society answered his request for information.

"On January 12, 1918, you were left in Gimbel's Department Store by a woman who was thought to be your mother," the letter stated. The abandoned child was named Arthur Field, assigned a birthday (December 2, 1917), and baptized Protestant.

"I was devastated," Smith admitted, "and for a long time did not even want to talk about it with anyone. Instead of roots, I inherited a mystery, and a puzzle with too many missing parts."

Smith learned all he could about the orphan train era and has since embarked on a journey of another kind: to tell the story of orphan trains, sharing information that is missing from most history books.

"These are real-life, fascinating stories waiting to be told," Smith stated. Children today, he observes, experience misfortunes every bit as painful as the ones orphan train riders encountered years ago: abuse, neglect, divorce, substance abuse, and violence. He shares his story explaining that "regardless of how difficult life is when you're young, hard work, education, and clean living will give you success later in life."

Just ask an orphan train rider.

In 1936, Smith graduated from high school in Clarinda. He was active in church, sports, music, and drama. Smith served in the army and was wounded in Italy during World War II. He married Georgianna Phillips, a school teacher in New Jersey, and started manufacturing trailers and hitches there after the war using welding skills he learned on his father's farm in Iowa.

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Chosen: The Story of Dorothy Urch

Dorothy Urch, 88, has always known she was adopted. But until three years ago, she didn't know she'd ridden an orphan train. While attending a health class at the retirement community in Greenville, South Carolina, where she now lives, Urch introduced herself. "I said I had been taken from New York and adopted in Iowa," she told *The Goldfinch*. The teacher's response: "Oh, you rode an orphan train."

"An orphan train?" Urch inquired. She had never heard of orphan trains.

"I went to the historical society in Kossuth County [in Iowa] and looked through old newspapers and found a clipping that told of my arrival and placement with the Johnsons. I knew then that riding the orphan train really was a fact," Urch said.

Urch's journey from New York to Iowa began when her father, Frank Brooks, died in 1916 when she was five years old. Urch, born Dorothy Kathryn Brooks, was the ninth of ten children. Her mother, Mary Elizabeth Tyler Brooks, couldn't support the three youngest children alone. Mary's own mother was dead, and her father had returned to England. Her father's family had lived in San Francisco, but they apparently perished in the earthquake and fire in 1906. No record of them could be found.

Urch's mother turned custody of her three youngest children over to The Children's Aid Society, hoping they'd have a better life than she could provide. Soon Urch and her older brother, Albert, boarded an orphan train. "We ended up in Algona, Iowa, with different families," she explained. "Charles, my little brother, was only two-and-a-half when he was sent on another orphan train to Chanute, Kansas."

Dorothy, age 3

John and Carrie Johnson, who farmed near Algona, adopted Dorothy. "The Johnsons' only daughter, Clara, died when she was 13 months old. They couldn't have any more children," Urch said. "When I got to the Johnsons, my name became Dorothy Mae Johnson. Mae was the middle name of the Johnsons' daughter who died."

PHOTOS: COURTESY DOROTHY URCH

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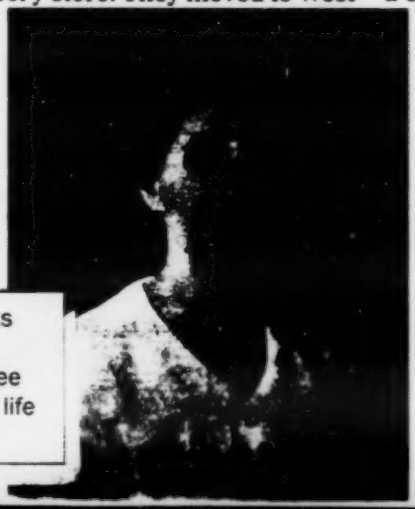
Urch immediately fell in love with her adopted family. "I felt like they accepted me right away and I was one of the family." She learned how to feed chickens, gather eggs, garden, and do household chores. She enjoyed growing up on a farm.

When Urch was 12, her birth mother asked the Johnsons for permission to visit Dorothy in Iowa. The Johnsons agreed. Urch met her birth mother and learned she had two sisters who had died before she was born, in addition to the six brothers she remembered. She visited her birth family in New York several times. The Johnsons encouraged her visits and even accompanied her to New York once.

"I was happy to meet them, but I didn't want to go back there," Urch said. "My adoptive parents were my real mother and father. I guess I was glad to know about [my birth family]. It helped answer questions about who I was."

Urch stayed in Algona and finished high school, then went on to get her teaching degree. "I taught school for three years in the schoolhouse I went to as a child," she said.

In 1933, she married Irving Urch, whom she met at the local grocery store. They moved to West Concord, Minnesota, in 1938. They moved back to the Johnson farm when her adoptive father became ill, taking care of him until he died in 1955. They then moved to Greenville, S.C.



Mary Elizabeth Tyler Brooks hoped The Children's Aid Society could offer her three youngest children a better life than she could provide.

"I lost track of Charles. His name got changed [to John S. Craig] and this made it hard to track him down. My daughter has a computer, and she was able to find a record of him. He died about 22 years ago in Indiana," Urch said. His adoptive family moved from Kansas to Canada, and eventually to Ohio.

"My feeling from the time I went to Iowa was that I belonged there," Dorothy Urch told *The Goldfinch*.

"I kept in touch with Albert for about five years until he decided to go back to New York to be with Mother," Urch said. The Algona widow who took Albert ran a boardinghouse and only wanted someone to wash dishes and sweep floors. "It didn't work out, so he went back," she explained.

Dorothy Urch is glad to have been placed out as a child. The alternative: she might have ended up a child wandering the streets of New York. "My feeling from the time I went to Iowa was that I belonged there. Some children didn't have good experiences," Urch said. "I did."

Urch gives talks to school children about being an orphan train rider. She tells children that she does not feel sad about being adopted. "To be adopted is to be chosen," Urch said. She hopes kids can find encouragement in her story.

"I encourage children having a hard time that they can overcome obstacles like I did," she said.

—By Susanne Leibold

Clara Comstock: Attempting the Impossible

"Miss Clara B. Comstock, who brought a company of children here Friday, under the direction of the New York Children's Aid Society, to be distributed among the people of this section, regards it a very successful distribution."

—*The Fayette Reporter*, May 9, 1912

Clara Comstock, a placing agent for The Children's Aid society, was mentioned prominently in many articles in Iowa newspapers describing the "distribution" of children. Placing agents formed a vital link between children in orphanages and people in rural areas. They selected the children who would be placed out and supervised them on the long train trips west. Agents also made annual visits to check on children in their new homes.

Comstock worked for The Children's Aid Society for more than 40 years beginning in 1903. From 1911 through 1928, she made 74 trips to Iowa and other states with groups of children. At one point, she was the society's Iowa State Manager. Often Comstock was the only adult accompanying the orphans, although she insisted on taking another agent along after being in a train wreck with 10 children.

"[Children] would often ask when I visited the Brace Farm School [in New York], 'Take me with you, Miss Comstock. I have been a good boy.'"

—*Clara Comstock*

Trains bound for Iowa usually left New York at noon on Tuesday so they would reach their destination on Friday. During the trips, Comstock was so busy she rarely slept. She fed the children non-perishable foods, including bread, peanut butter, celery, apples, raisins, and cookies. The train stopped in towns along the way to pick up fresh milk and ice to keep it cold. She nursed children suffering from motion sickness and tried to comfort frightened children. Her emergency bag was

Photo: Courtesy The Children's Aid Society

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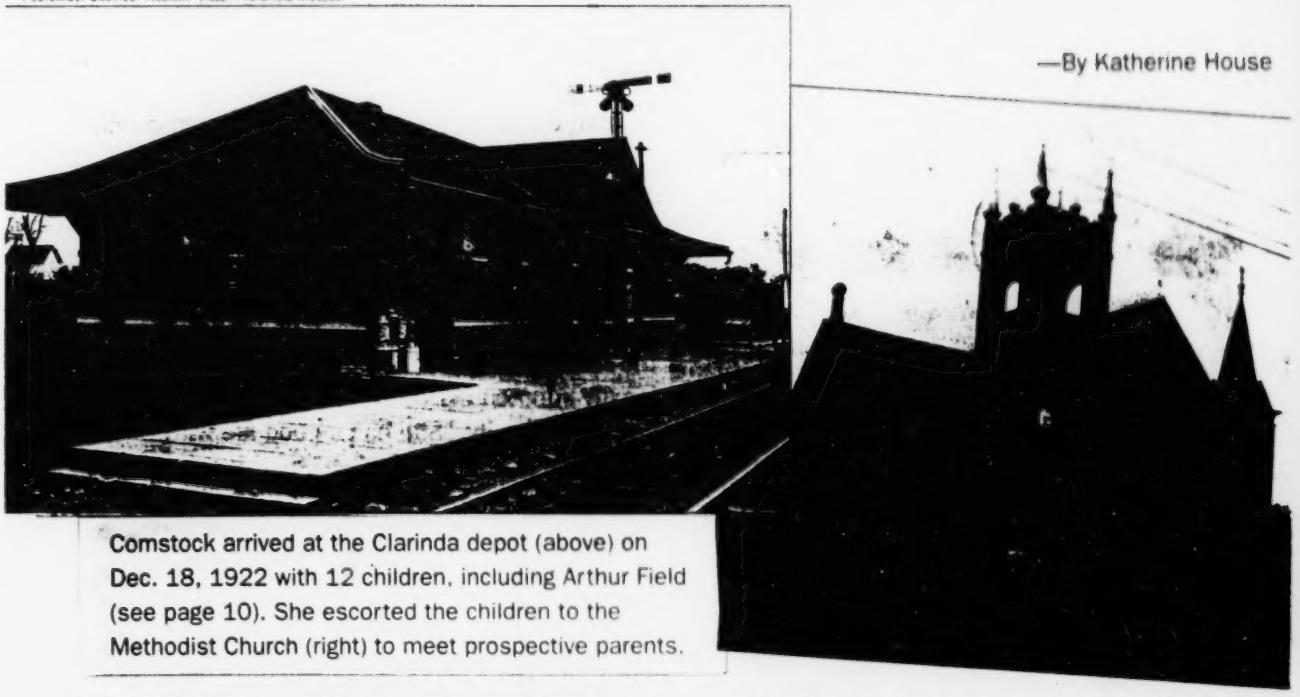
Postcards: Courtesy Nodaway Valley Historical Museum

—By Katherine House



Comstock arrived at the Clarinda depot (above) on Dec. 18, 1922 with 12 children, including Arthur Field (see page 10). She escorted the children to the Methodist Church (right) to meet prospective parents.

filled with silverware, bibs, towels, medicine, a sewing kit, and a Sterno burner to heat milk for babies.

Other passengers on the trains often donated money, which Comstock sent to the society's main office. Sometimes they gave the children candy. "[The candy] was not so appreciated as it usually took the form of black chocolate and we were kept busy washing hands and faces," Comstock once said.

Upon arriving in a town, Comstock fed, washed, and dressed the children in their best clothes. Then she took them to a town hall or other meeting place. An article in the Clarinda newspaper on Dec. 18, 1922, said, "Miss Comstock introduced the children and had several of them sing or speak pieces to show their smartness." The article described how Arthur Field and eleven other children were displayed for the community.

Usually children who were selected went to their new homes the day they arrived in town. Comstock then spent the weekend resting, learning more about the children's families, and visiting with townspeople. Beginning on Monday, she traveled by lumber wagon, buggy, sleigh, freight train, or caboose, and, in later years, by truck, to meet with the children and their families. It took a week or two to visit all the children in their new homes and write up reports.

"We were constantly attempting the impossible and accomplishing it," Comstock said in a speech to Children's Aid Society employees in 1931. "The work was a great adventure in Faith, we were always helped and grew to expect kindness, deep interest and assistance everywhere."

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PHOTOS: COURTESY ETTA OWEN

Dorothea Kniess

By Jan Wolbers

Dorothea Emily Amelia Caroline Dagma Kniess was all alone. Her young mother and older sister had died, and her father had left the country. She was nine years old.

Her father had uprooted his wife, Emily, and young daughter from their home in Copenhagen, Denmark, and moved them to America. Emily was pregnant with Dorothea when they journeyed across the ocean to their new home. Dorothea's father eventually returned to Copenhagen, leaving his wife and two children to survive on their own in New York City. First Emily's oldest daughter died of tuberculosis, then Emily became ill and died when she was 29.

Dorothea was placed in a New York City orphanage. Soon, she was placed aboard an orphan train and sent west. "How frightened she must have been," her daughter, Etta Owen, of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, told *The Goldfinch*. "She had no idea where she was going."

In October 1898, Dorothea's train came directly to Burlington, Iowa, from New York. According to the *Burlington Evening Gazette*, nine children were on board, accompanied by Mr. J.W. Shields of the New York Juvenile Asylum. The children were displayed to potential parents at the Union Hotel.

Dorothea was chosen by the Charles Fleenor family of Danville, Iowa. The Fleenors had four children of their own, "but they needed someone else to help out," said Etta. "There was a lot to do on the farm." Dorothea did work hard for the Fleenors, but so did all of the family members; she was treated the same as the other children. The Fleenors never legally adopted Dorothea, but she felt like a member of the family. "She had a good life with them," said Etta. "She was lucky."

The Fleenors provided Dorothea with an education beyond the 8th grade, sending her to Howe's Academy in Mt. Pleasant. There, Dorothea met her future husband, Noah Landrum. Together, they had eight children and survived two world wars and the depression. One child, Max, died in 1918 of Spanish influenza. Etta Kniess Landrum Owen was their youngest child. "Mother worked hard all of her life," recalled Etta. "She and Father eked out a living on the farm and guarded the health of their children." Etta recalls the Fleenors with fondness. "I called them Aunt Polly and Uncle Charlie."

Dorothea Emily Amelia Caroline Dagma Kniess Landrum died in 1964, three years after the death of her husband. The little girl who had lost everything gained it back after being chosen by a family who loved her.

Dorothea had such a long name because she was named after all of her godmothers!

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Ruth Hickok

In October 1917, Ruth Hickok landed in Forest City, Iowa. "Every time kids got off of a train and [were] accepted and taken to some home, it was called, 'they landed,'" she explained. "There was a lot of crying after stops where children landed."

Born Agnes Anderson to Norwegian immigrants on August 25, 1912, Ruth entered a New York orphanage for Norwegian children when she was only 22 months old. Her father had deserted the family, and her mother could not care for Agnes and her infant sister, Evelyn.

Agnes spent more than three years in the orphanage. Her mother visited once a week. When visits suddenly stopped, Agnes was chosen to ride an orphan train.

When she arrived in Iowa, Agnes was taken in by an elderly couple. "I cried when Miss Comstock [the placing agent who accompanied Ruth's group] left me," Ruth said. When she wouldn't stop crying, her foster mother locked her in the cellar for the night. "I was scared to death of that lady," Ruth recalled. Comstock returned to check on Agnes the next morning. "I grabbed ahold of [Miss Comstock] and wouldn't let go. I couldn't cry. I couldn't talk," Ruth said. Comstock removed Ruth from that home and took her to the Jensons, a Forest City family that had two older boys. A third brother was born later. "When I got to the Jensons, I told Miss Comstock I didn't want to sleep [in a cellar] where it was black and smelly." The Jensons changed Agnes' name to Ruth Agnes because an aunt living with the family was named Agnes, too.

At school, Ruth, who understood English but spoke Norwegian, was told not to speak a foreign language. At first she did not know what a foreign language was. "Other kids called me 'trash' [because of my background]," she told *The Goldfinch*. "It hurt." A loner as a child, Ruth says she "liked families with lots of kids. It seemed more like the orphanage, I suppose."

Ruth searched for her younger sister for many years, but never found her. She has shared her experiences as an orphan train rider with dozens of service and community organizations. Today 87-year-old Ruth has two grown children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

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At Home in Maquoketa:

Dorothy Buck

Story and photos by Susanne Leibold

Dorothy Jean Ritchie was born in New York on December 9, 1918. Her mother, Arlene Ritchie, was 16 years old and unmarried. Her father, Leon Stacy, was only 15.

Arlene made arrangements with the Canandaigua Orphanage in Canandaigua, New York, to temporarily care for Dorothy. She found a job as a nursemaid in Ithaca, New York, and paid the orphanage $2 a week. About six months later, when she went to pick up her little girl, Arlene was informed that her mother had turned legal custody of the child over to the orphanage. Dorothy had been taken to The Children's Aid Society and was already on a westbound train. Dorothy was placed out to James and Emma Pier of Maquoketa, Iowa, in 1919.

Dorothy was too young to remember any of her life at the orphanage. She did not even know she was adopted until she was four years old.

"We were visiting a friend of the family in Wisconsin when someone asked my mom if I was the little girl she had adopted," Dorothy told *The Goldfinch*. "I asked, 'Who is my real mommy?' Mom replied, 'You're our little girl now. I don't know where your mommy is.'"

"Emma was my adoptive mother. She was 46. James, my adoptive dad, was 51. They had always wanted children. They formally adopted me a year later and gave me the name Dorothy Ritchie Pier."

Dorothy went to school and learned to do household chores. "My adoptive mother also taught me to cook," she said. "I learned how to cook a lot of German food. I really liked to cook. I still do."

In 1929, when Dorothy was 11 years old, banks closed and unemployment increased because of an **economic depression**. The Piers lost all their money when the Maquoketa bank closed. Then, later that same year, James Pier died of a heart attack. Life changed dramatically for Dorothy and Emma.

"We lived on a shoestring budget for quite awhile. Mom was forced to support us by selling vegetables from the garden and chickens we raised. She also did sewing projects through W.P.A., a government program to assist people with no money," Dorothy said.

After several years of scraping by, Emma sold their property and moved to an apartment in Maquoketa. "In '38, I had just graduated from high school. I took a part-time job on Saturdays as a clerk at a five and dime store [Ben Franklin] in Maquoketa. I made $1.17 per day. I helped out as

economic depression: a time when the business activity slows and many people lose their jobs.

20

$1.17 per day in 1938 would be the same as earning $13.20 per day in 1999.

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best I could. I was also working on my certificate to teach school. Mom helped out with tuition as best she could. I taught elementary school at the same schoolhouse I went to as a kid."

Dorothy became curious about her birth family and traveled to New York to visit Canandaigua Orphanage. "Most of the building was torn down," she recalled. "I went up into the part still standing and talked to a lady who had worked there for many years. When I told the lady who I was, she smiled and said she remembered me, and she knew my family. She took a letter from the file that Arlene wrote when I was placed there. She also gave me the address of my grandmother."

Dorothy took the information back home to Maquoketa. She wrote her grandmother a letter explaining who she was. Her grandmother wrote her back, excited to hear from Dorothy.

In 1940, Dorothy went to New York to meet her grandmother. While there, she met Charles Curtis Buck, her grandmother's neighbor—and her future husband.

Dorothy moved to New York and taught school while she and Charles made wedding plans. They were married in 1941. Dorothy also met her mother, Arlene, who was married and had several children.

"I lived close by all my family and kept in touch with Arlene and my grandmother. I never became very close to either of them, but I had a good relationship with both of them. I just considered them friends."

Ironically, Dorothy's father-in-law knew her biological father. They had been friends for years. One day her father-in-law ran into Leon Stacy and asked if he'd like to meet his daughter.

"[My father] was stunned. He thought Arlene had a son," Dorothy said. A few days later, a meeting was arranged between Dorothy and her birth father. "I was a little nervous, but I immediately liked my father. I didn't get to know him very well because he died shortly after we met."

"You always wonder why you were given away and what kind of people you came from. Meeting my family has answered those questions," says Dorothy.

Today, Dorothy goes to history classes and tells her story. She talks to young children about being adopted and finding her birth family. She feels fortunate to have been adopted by loving parents who accepted her as part of the family.

This is the church on East Platt Street in Maquoketa where Dorothy and other orphan train riders were chosen by foster families.

...[T]he Congregational church was comfortably filled by the many who came to see the twelve boys and girls who were brought here by Miss Comstock.... Every child was the picture of health, cleanliness and showed that those in charge of them have given nothing but the best treatment in every way. Dorothy Ritchie attracted the attention of many and finally Mr.and Mrs. James Pier of Route Five were awarded this little cherub. The best baby you ever saw: not even a whimper out of her and this at the end of a hard train trip all the way from New York.

—from an article that appeared in a 1919 Maquoketa newspaper.

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Photo: S. Leibold/SHSI (Iowa City)

Steve Ferguson, Isaac Miller, and Alice Kahn helped put orphan train history on the web when they were in 3rd grade. Now, as 7th graders, they described their project for *The Goldfinch*. Check out their work at: **www.maquoketa.k12.ia.us/orphan_train.html**

What do you do when you find history in your own backyard? You make a website on the Internet and share it! At least that's what some third graders did at Brigg's Elementary School in Maquoketa, Iowa, in 1996. The web site idea was sparked by a fictional book about an orphan train rider, *In the Face of Danger*, by Joan Lowery Nixon.

After reading the book, Merry Kahn, library media specialist, learned that an orphan train stopped in Maquoketa in 1919 . She also discovered that there were orphan train riders still living in Maquoketa. Kahn approached third grade teachers Sherry Bickford, Jane Long, and Karen Penningroth about doing a research project on the subject. With the help of their third grade students, they built a website to teach others about orphan train riders.

A grant allowed them to purchase a computer, digital camera, scanner, and a computer software program to construct the website. Students were separated into groups to become experts on one piece of computer equipment.

"Students read articles on the orphan trains, went to the library, and looked up old articles on microfilm to learn more about when the orphan train came through. They also visited the train depot, the church, and hotel where the orphans stayed. This made it more real for them," Kahn said.

"We all did a lot of research. The kids loved it. This happened to kids their age. It was tangible and I think it really hit home," said Penningroth.

Dorothy Buck, one of the orphan train riders who lives in Maquoketa, came and visited the school. Students videotaped the visit and put excerpts of the video on the web site.

Alice Kahn
3rd grade

"I liked learning about the train depot, the Decker House, and the church where the orphans went to be picked," said Alice Kahn, now age 13, who took pictures and did some typing on the project. "The train depot and the Decker House are now restaurants. The orphans slept overnight in the Decker House, which used to be a hotel."

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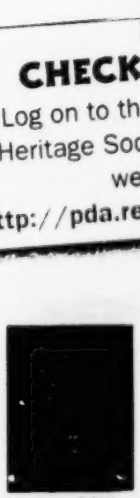
CHECK IT OUT!

Log on to the Orphan Train Heritage Society of America website:

http://pda.republic.net/othsa



Isaac Miller
3rd grade

The train depot in Maquoketa today.

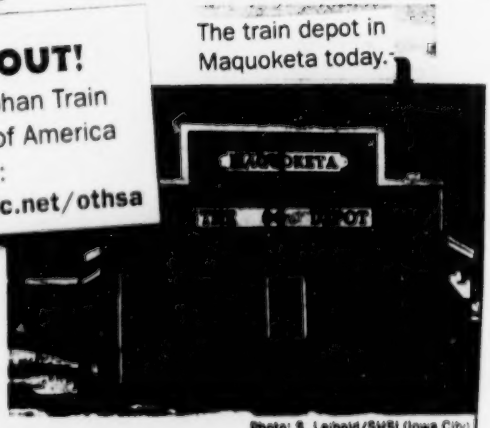


Photo: S. Leibold/SHSI (Iowa City)

Isaac Miller worked with the scanner and video camera. "I didn't know much about the orphan trains," he said. "I wondered how the whole thing worked. I thought some of the stories were sad because some got picked to do farm work and weren't treated like part of the family."

Steve Ferguson liked doing research, especially working with primary documents. "I was surprised they were often taken to do labor," he said. "It was hard to hear how much pain and suffering they went through with their parents, and then have to go find new parents. I think I am pretty lucky I didn't have to go through that."

Students kept journals throughout the project. "In the beginning, many didn't know what the orphan trains were. By the time we were finished, the kids had developed empathy for the orphan train riders," said Bickford.

"The students got a better understanding about the problems that brought the orphans out west on trains. The students put in a lot of time and effort on the project," Long said. "I think it turned out well."

—By Susanne Leibold

SURFING THE WEB TO TRACK TRAIN RIDERS!

Today, the information superhighway is helping orphan train riders retrace the rails. When Dorothy Urch (see page 12) wanted to track down her younger brother, Charles, she and her daughter turned to the World Wide Web.

"Due to privacy laws, The Children's Aid Society could only give Charles' adopted name [John S. Craig] and his birth date," said Urch's daughter, Jo Ann Boehm. They spent hours searching on-line. "There were literally hundreds of John S. Craigs."

Boehm thought she'd exhausted every avenue on the internet. But then she discovered the Social Security Administration's master death list on-line. The list showed more than 700 deceased men named John Craig. She narrowed her search using her uncle's birth date and middle initial. Boehm found a listing for John S. Craig with the correct birth date who died in 1977 in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Boehm called a Fort Wayne newspaper. An obituary was faxed to her the same day. "When I saw the obituary listed this John Craig's birthplace as Mt. Vernon, New York, I knew it was him. I called my mom and told her we had found him."

Urch wanted to meet her brother's family. Through on-line phone lists, Boehm found Charles' wife in Ohio. "I wanted to call her that night, but I didn't know what to say," Boehm said. "Finally, I picked up the phone and called." After hours of searching, Urch finally met her brother's family.

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A New Hope in Iowa

by Susan Smoots

"My grandmother is a genealogist who tells great, true stories about my ancestors," said Susan Smoots, 14, of Renton, Washington. "One of my favorites is about Lawrence and Harriet Duffy Denneny who migrated from Ireland and adopted a girl from the orphan train." Here, Susan retells Mary Denneny's story.

March 16, 1897

It has been three days since we left New York City. I used to be a singing girl there. I sang in pubs and at the docks, trying to earn a penny or two. I don't know who—or where—my parents are. I go by the name "Becky," and have fought for life just like all the other children living in the streets. I have always felt alone—but how can you be alone when you live in crowded New York City?

The Children's Aid Society took me in. My favorite teacher there gave you to me, dear diary. One day they told us how we could ride a train out to the country to be taken in by families. My dream come true: a family to belong to!

We've just arrived in Iowa City, Iowa. Hopefully, each of us will go home with a new mother and father. I'm terrified. What if no one wants me?

Iowa City's tidy houses and shops look so different from New York City's tall and dilapidated tenements! The woman from The Children's Aid Society led us to the church and onto the platform in front. I studied the townspeople's faces. Some people looked pleasant, but others scrutinized us skeptically, as if they were measuring the hours of work we could perform. Two of those strangers might be my new parents!

My spine tingled when The Children's Aid Society representative mentioned me in her speech. Then she invited people to talk to us. An older man and his wife approached me. They spoke with a lilting Irish brogue and hopeful faces. "Would you like to come home and be our little girl?" the man asked.

Without hesitation, I gasped, "Yes!"

March 17, 1897

I woke up in my own bed in my own room! Mother and Father—oh, it feels wonderful to call them that—told me that their own little Mary died 33 years ago at the age of nine. They have named me Mary after her. I wonder what their Mary was like. I hope I will please them, and that they'll love me just as much as they loved their own daughter.

Father taught me how to take the eggs out from beneath the feisty hens and lay them gently in

a bucket. My favorite place in the barn is the loft. It was full of rough, musty hay. I jumped from the loft onto the gigantic pile of hay on the barn floor.

March 24, 1897

Father took me to school today. When I stepped into the room, the other children whispered among themselves and cast wary glances at me. After the teacher rapped for order, they completely ignored me. I felt so lonely and small. I wanted to go home.

At recess, the other children played tag. I asked to join them but they refused. I was an orphan, they said, so they wanted nothing to do with me.

I ate lunch alone. A girl named Agnes sat down beside me and said that she'd be my friend. When school was over, Agnes' mother found us talking. She grabbed Agnes by the arm and marched outside, scolding her all the way.

March 25, 1897

Today at school, Agnes didn't sit next to me. Amidst the hustle of lunch break, she drew me aside. "Mary, Mother told me that I may not play with you." Devastated, I reluctantly turned away.

Maybe if I can prove that I am a fast runner, the children at school will let me play tag with them. I've made up my mind to run wherever I go so I will be as swift as the wind.

April 16, 1897

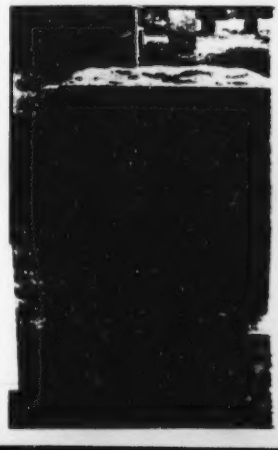
I ran all the way home from school today. I have a stitch in my side and am seeing stars, but I'm glowing with hope.

April 17, 1897

I could hardly sit still on the hard school bench as I waited for lunch break. As soon as the school bell rang, all the children tumbled out into the warm sunshine. I asked the boy who was organizing a game of tag if I could play. I looked him right in the eye. "All right," he said grudgingly, "but you're *it*." My stomach tightened in a nervous knot. The other children stood around me waiting. My eyes settled on Agnes. I bounded after her. We raced around the school. My knees grew weak and I was gasping for breath when I finally touched her shoulder. She whirled around to face me with a grin. "You did great!" she exclaimed. Then, in a whisper, "I've been talking with my mother, and she intends to have your family over for dinner after church this Sunday. Before you came, she heard stories about orphans that made her afraid of me making friends with one. She'll see what a nice girl you are, and then she'll let us be friends." My heart nearly burst!

June 8, 1900

Today the census was taken. A man came to our door and asked us all sorts of questions. I was proud to say that I'm Mary Denneny, the adopted daughter of Lawrence and Harriet Denneny, born in 1884 in New York. I am fifteen years old. I wonder if someday someone will read the census and wonder who Mary Denneny was. Well, now at least you, dear diary, know.



This is the Lawrence and Harriet Denneny gravesite at St. Joseph Cemetery in Iowa City. Also buried there is their first daughter who died at age nine.

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Madonna Harms:
HISTORY KEEPER!

"I've got lots of stories," Madonna Harms, 70, told *The Goldfinch*. Five years ago Harms opened the Iowa Orphan Train Research Center in her Rolfe, Iowa, home.

"There was no other place [in Iowa] where children [who rode orphan trains to Iowa] were listed—no place you could go to gather information," Harms said. Two rooms of her house are filled with photographs, yellowed newspaper clippings, letters, lists of cities where orphan trains stopped, names of families who took children, dates of arrivals, flyers, copies of adoption papers and indentures, books on railroad history...

And lots of stories describing the lives of orphan train riders. Some accounts were written by riders, others by descendants of riders. An article from the *Oskaloosa Herald* dated August 13, 1868, is the earliest newspaper clipping in Harms' collection describing an orphan train arrival in Iowa. But Harms believes children were placed out in Iowa much earlier. "As soon as the railroad came across the Mississippi River, children riding orphan trains would have come, too," Harms said. An article describing the orphan train journey to Michigan in 1854 states that children not chosen in Michigan traveled to Minnesota and Iowa to find homes. One account among the riders' stories she has collected describes children coming to Dubuque in the early 1860s aboard freight cars. Upon arrival, they rode in a livery wagon to the local opera house to be selected by prospective parents.

"It's also possible that Iowa folks went into Illinois to get children before the trains came into Iowa," Harms said. "People often traveled 50 miles or more to get a child when they knew a train was coming."

Perry Hoffey, left, came to Iowa on a "baby special." He is pictured with his wife, Agnes.

Harms' father, born Pierre Casson, was 10 weeks old when he was placed in the Catholic Foundling Home in New York City. "He rode a 'baby special' or 'mercy car,' as the sisters called them, to Parnell, Iowa," Harms explained. She's not sure when he rode the train, but she knows he and a little girl on the train were taken by the same family "because they wouldn't let go of each other's hands." Her father's name was changed to Perry Joseph Hoffey. He "absorbed" the name of the family who took him, Harms said. "Many families didn't legally adopt the children they took in because adoption meant the right to inherit. Sometimes children were given the family name right away, others waited until later." Finding more information on her father's history is one of the mysteries Harms is anxious to solve.

Harms answers six or seven requests for information about orphan train riders each week. Last year, 62 schools contacted her while researching orphan trains. Another part of her job: bringing descendants of orphan train riders together. Sometimes she'll get inquiries about one rider from several different families. Harms puts those families in touch with each other, helping them find relatives they didn't know they had. GF

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Letters from Riders

Orphan train riders were encouraged to write The Children's Aid Society to describe their new homes. Some of their letters were published in the society's annual reports. The reports were designed to demonstrate how well the placing-out system worked. In turn, the society hoped that wealthy people, impressed by the emigration system, would donate money to the society so it could help more children.

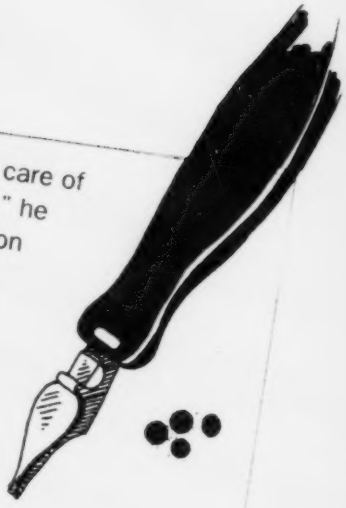
A boy identified as "J.P." wrote from Tama County in May 1870:

> "We are now very busy cornplanting, sowing wheat, etc., etc. The far West is a splendid country—a most luxurious country—poverty is hardly known. What a blessing it is to me that ever I should come out. I am getting on well, let me tell you; very happy and comfortable; a good home and lots of true friends."

Another boy, "L.C." wrote from an unidentified Iowa town in September 1874 that "I am sorry to hear that there are so many young men running around the streets and no work. If they were only out here they could get all the work they want. I thank God that I ain't there and running around the streets like them." He went on to explain that many people were "sickly" and dying. He asked The Children's Aid Society to help him locate his sister, who had been placed in a home somewhere else.

A boy placed in Buchanan County wrote a long letter in 1874 describing his chores on the farm.

> "I help to take care of the cattle and hogs," he wrote. "I feed them on corn and swill, and water the hogs, and clean the barn, feed the horses hay and oats, and water them, and I cut corn in the field and rake hay, and put it up on a pile, and churn butter once or twice a week, and take in wood, chop wood, and haul manure with the boys, and I take out the cattle and turn them out."



Another youngster had read a recent newspaper article criticizing the treatment of children who were placed out. He wrote:

> "I noticed a piece in *Harper's Weekly* about the boys sent out West, saying that we were overworked, fed on coarse salt meat; had to work late and early, that our hands and faces were the color of the rich loam soil. I say that every word of it is untrue as far as I am concerned; and I know the boys I have seen were treated well, fed on the best, had a horse to ride where they pleased."

In 1909, Gertrude C. wrote to describe a surprise party held in her honor. She bragged that "Mamma made me four new school dresses for next spring" and declared that she would "study harder" so she could become a teacher.

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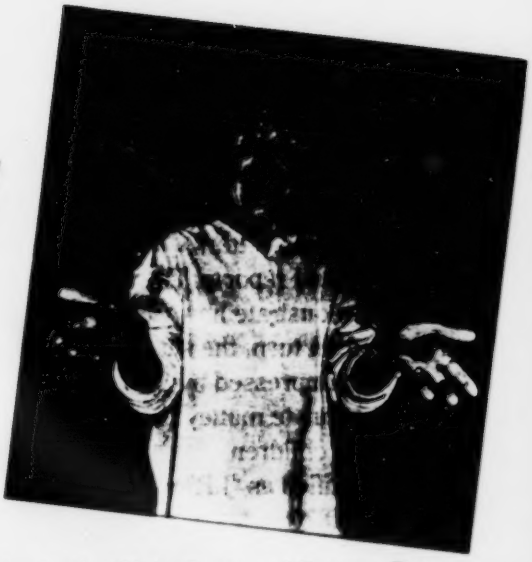
Catching History in the Act

Pippa, above, talked to *The Goldfinch* after performing "The Story of the Orphan Train" in Des Moines.



Pippa White walked on stage carrying a small suitcase containing a few simple props—hats, a pair of glasses, an apron, and a train whistle. She warned her audience (250 elementary students packed into seats surrounding three sides of the stage) that this program would be longer than most designed for schools. Orphan train survivors who have seen her show, who have contributed their stories to it, won't let her cut anything out. ***We want them to know how it was for us,*** they tell Pippa.

"Riders ask that you remember them," Pippa said to her audience in Des Moines on February 21, 2000. "There are about 200 riders alive now, and they are all senior citizens. If we don't know their stories, soon they won't be here to tell them."

The Goldfinch caught up with Pippa after one of ten sold-out performances in the Stoner Studio Theatre in the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines. Pippa—a California-born actress who moved with her husband to Lincoln, Nebraska, 20 years ago—has created her own career.

"I've been an actress all my life. Coming to Nebraska made me realize that if I wanted to be a working actress, I was going to have to do something on my own," Pippa explained. "So, I began thinking about what would sell—what audiences in the Midwest want to hear about."

Pippa had heard of the orphan trains a couple of times after moving to Nebraska and thought the topic sounded intriguing. Nine years ago, when she decided to produce a show on the subject, very little was written about orphan trains.

"I found only two books at the library," Pippa said. She was convinced those stories would make great material for a solo dramatic performance.

Pippa went to an Orphan Train Heritage Society of America reunion in Arkansas to meet some of the riders and gather material for her show. "It was the last night and I was just leaving when I

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Pippa White brings history to kids—something that happened long ago is right in front of you. As part of her show, she portrays a German boy named Bill (left), Ruth Hickok (right) and Clara Comstock (far right).

met 'Toots' [orphan train rider Alice Ayler]." Toots exclaimed, "An actress. That's what we need!"

"I feel very, very grateful to the survivors," Pippa said. "They send me their old pictures. They encourage me. They say, 'Sure, take my story by all means!' Nobody ever said no to me."

More than 2,000 kids attended Pippa's performances during her week in Des Moines. "I could have sold the shows out three more times and still had a waiting list," said Maureen Korte, Civic Center education coordinator.

How does Pippa explain the show's appeal? "Everyone's curious about orphanages. There's a certain mystique about the topic. This is such a big piece of history, but it's not well known," she said.

Pippa believes the orhpan train era is hidden history because "it was shameful to be an orphan, and it was even shameful to take an orphan back then. It was not something people talked about. That's why it was forgotten," she said.

"It's the riders' stories that have made it a good show," Pippa said. "No matter how talented you are, you have to have good material. Orphan train stories are real, true, captivating, fascinating, and riveting. What more could I ask for?"

Photos: M. Fresz/SHSI (Iowa City)

Pippa portrays 11 characters during the 75-minute orphan train show. Putting their stories together at her dining room table was like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. "I feel like I know these orphans," she said. "I didn't have to work too hard developing characters because I've lived with their stories for so long."

For an actress, the resourcefulness of kids who managed to triumph over real hardships is a rags-to-riches story that always sells.

As a mom (she has two teenagers), Pippa doesn't think kids could find better role models than orphan train riders. "Riders tell me they don't have much patience with people who feel sorry for themselves because they've had to suffer. They say, 'That happened to us, too, but we don't use it as an excuse.' I admire their resourcefulness."

For information about Pippa White's performances, contact: One's Company, 2240 Lake Street, Lincoln, NE 68502. For information about Civic Center education programs, contact Maureen Korte at (515) 243-0766.

Carlo's Journey Home

Goldfinch Fiction by Norma T. Balding

"Will we ever get there?" Carlo said impatiently, to no one in particular. *Wherever 'there' is,* he wondered to himself. He was tired of sharing his seat with little children who couldn't sit still. He was tired of crying babies. He didn't know if he could choke down another mustard sandwich. But most of all, the skinny boy with black hair and a dark complexion was weary of staring out the train windows. To him, the countryside was boring compared to the noise and the activity of his New York City surroundings. Maybe leaving New York wasn't such a good idea after all.

Carlo was six years old when he and his parents arrived in New York in 1888. They rented a room on the ground floor in a Mulberry Street tenement in an area known as Little Italy. "The room has no windows," his mother had observed when they first moved in. She had covered her nose with a kerchief, but nothing could block the building's horrible smell. The long voyage across the ocean had left her pale and thin.

"Soon we will move to a better place," Carlo's father had assured them. "We will save for a place of our own." At first Carlo's parents spoke often of their dreams for their new life in America. They worked long days in a factory while Carlo earned pennies selling newspapers on street corners and learned English from other Italian immigrant children. The money they earned barely paid the rent, leaving little for food or clothes. Soon they did not speak of their dreams at all.

Carlo's mother died less than a year later. His father, choking back tears, said good-bye to Carlo

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the next morning and left for work. He never returned. Carlo learned how to forage for food in the garbage and to find shelter in discarded cartons beneath the piers. One day, a woman he'd never seen before offered him a meal of hot soup and biscuits. Carlo hesitated. *Had she seen him steal cabbage from the market? Would she turn him in?* Hunger gnawed deep within his belly. *Should he follow her?*

Now, in 1892, the mighty train chugged on and on. Carlo remembered the hot meals at the orphanage. And the clothes they had given him to replace the rags he was wearing. Then, someone from The Children's Aid Society told him about all of the orphaned or abandoned children who were "placed-out" with farm families in the Midwest. Carlo did not know where he was headed or what his future would hold, but he climbed aboard the passenger car loaded with other children heading west.

At last the long train pulled into a station, the brakes squealing to a stop. "Where are we, ma'am?" Carlo asked one of the attendants traveling with the children.

"Eagle Grove, Iowa," Miss Allen answered, looking tired after such a long trip with so many children. She smiled at him and said, "This is where we get off."

Carlo and the other children were herded into a long waiting room occupied by groups of curious strangers. Children who weren't selected would get back on the train and travel to the next stop. Carlo waited, almost afraid to breathe. *What next?* he thought.

Carlo watched as the children around him were led away. By now Carlo was the only boy left. Pushing his way through the crowd, a tall man leaned over in front of Carlo. His wife walked quickly to keep up with the man's long strides. "How old are you?" the stranger demanded.

"Ten, sir," ventured Carlo, almost whispering.

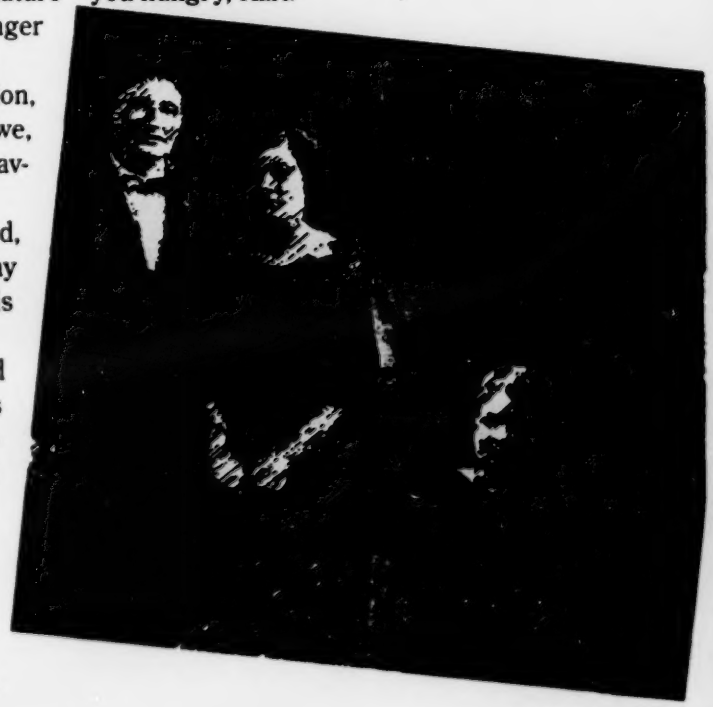
"What's your name?" was the farmer's next question.

"Carlo, sir."

"We're Gunther and Marta Schmidt. At our house you'll be *Karl*," he announced firmly. His wife nodded beneath her dark blue bonnet.

Papers were signed, and before he realized it, Carlo was seated in the Schmidts' handsome buggy, heading out of the small town.

No one spoke. Carlo fidgeted nervously in his seat. Finally Mrs. Schmidt smiled and asked, "Are you hungry, Karl?"



"No, ma'am. I'm fine, ma'am," Carlo answered, but his rumbling stomach betrayed him. "Yes, ma'am. I am hungry," he finally admitted.

When the buggy turned into a narrow lane, Carlo stared at the neat, two-story white house, and the tall, red barn.

"We're home," was all Mr. Schmidt said.

Once inside the comfortable house, Carlo could see everything was prepared for his arrival. The table was set and wonderful aromas drifted from the kitchen. His eyes widened when he saw all the food. He bent over the table and began devouring the roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, and green beans dripping with butter that Mr. Schmidt had heaped on his plate. Carlo looked up when he heard Mr. Schmidt clear his throat. He glared at Carlo, and Mrs. Schmidt shook her head.

"There is plenty of food, Karl," Mrs. Schmidt said. Was it disgust or pity Carlo detected in her voice? "Sit up and enjoy your meal—after we return thanks."

After supper, Carlo's eyes grew heavy. Mrs. Schmidt guided him toward his new bedroom at the head of the stairs. "*Gute nacht*, Karl," she said. "Sleep well."

Carlo snuggled under a warm quilt. He was almost asleep when he heard the Schmidts talking. Mr. Schmidt remarked, "He'll never make a farm hand...too skinny...weak as a kitten!" Mrs. Schmidt's soft voice was harder to hear above the clattering sounds coming from the kitchen below. "...the boy...10 years old? Looks to be only..."

"We should have gotten to the train station earlier," muttered Mr. Schmidt as he climbed the stairs. "Perhaps we could have gotten a good, strong German boy..."

Tears welled up in Carlo's eyes as he silently cried himself to sleep.

After breakfast the next morning, Carlo got a tour of the farm with a friendly collie close behind. In a gruff voice, Mr. Schmidt explained the chores Carlo would be expected to do. The under-sized city boy was overwhelmed. There was so much to learn!

Nevertheless, day after day Carlo *did* learn: how to feed the chickens, slop the hogs, gather fresh eggs, carry water in from the well, chop wood for the stove, hoe the garden, and even milk the Holstein cows, his small hands aching as the pail slowly filled.

Suddenly, the giant sow lunged at Mr. Schmidt...

Carlo filled out, too. Eating Mrs. Schmidt's wholesome meals and working hard gave Carlo new strength. At noon each day Carlo rode Star, the Schmidts' saddle horse, to the field where Mr. Schmidt hoed weeds that sprang up between the

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cornstalks. Sometimes Carlo helped in the field, his hands growing callused from the work.

Not once did Mr. Schmidt praise the boy's efforts; on the other hand, he never scolded him, in spite of the many mistakes Carlo made. Mrs. Schmidt, like her husband, seldom spoke. But she often rewarded him with fresh-baked goodies from her kitchen.

One morning, Carlo followed Mr. Schmidt to check on a sow and her new litter of piglets. "Wait here," Mr. Schmidt said as he slipped quietly into the pen. Suddenly, the giant sow lunged at Mr. Schmidt, pinning him against the gate. His leg snapped. When the sow retreated, Mr. Schmidt slumped to the ground, gasping with pain. Carlo pushed the gate open, grabbed Mr. Schmidt's arms, and pulled. At first Mr. Schmidt didn't budge. But when the sow lunged toward the injured farmer again, Carlo pulled with all his might and slammed the gate shut against the angry sow.

Carlo's lungs felt like they'd burst as he ran to the house for help. Mrs. Schmidt, who'd seen the commotion from the kitchen window, ran to meet Carlo in the yard. "Ride into town, Karl!" she shouted. "Get Dr. Black! *Hurry!*"

Carlo and Star flew along the dirt road into town. In record time Dr. Black, driving his sleek, shiny buggy, was at the farm. He and Carlo half dragged, half carried the unconscious Mr. Schmidt into the house. "Hold him down, Carlo," Dr. Black instructed. "He'll likely come to when I set the leg."

Dr. Black jerked the broken leg to get the bone back into position. Mr. Schmidt screamed and writhed in pain, but Carlo managed to hold him as Dr. Black tied a splint in place.

Mrs. Schmidt appeared in the doorway with a basin of water, towels, and a clean nightshirt for her husband, who was still caked with mud from the pen. "I'll take over now," she said through her tears, hugging Carlo tightly. "We're so proud of you, Karl."

Later, Mr. Schmidt called to his young farm hand. "I misjudged you, Karl," Mr. Schmidt began. "You work very hard, and now you've saved my life. In German, 'Karl' means *man* or *farmer*. You have proven that you are a man who can work beside me on this farm. If you will have me as a father, I will welcome you as my son." He paused, then asked, "How does the name Karl Schmidt sound to you?"

HISTORY MAKERS:

An Orphan Train brought Gabrielle Russon's great-great-grandmother west from New York. Then, almost a century later, Orphan Trains took Gabrielle east—to National History Day competition in Washington, D.C.

By Gabrielle Russon

Four years ago, I had never heard the name "Mabel Newby." Little did I know that she was my great-great-grandmother. I accidentally stumbled across my ancestor's name while involved in my History Day project.

I had no idea what topic I was going to choose when my sixth grade teacher at Alan Shepard Elementary School in Long Grove, Iowa, announced that our class would participate in the annual History Day competition. I was immediately overwhelmed by all the different topics associated with the 1997 theme, "Triumph and Tragedy in History." Looking at a list of potential topics, I decided that orphan trains sounded interesting. Using the Internet, I found several websites that gave me a basic understanding of orphan trains. It turns out that the information which I found so intriguing led me to a member of my family.

I learned that Charles Loring Brace developed a system to send orphaned and abandoned children by train to new homes in the west. My grandmother, Wanda Whitsitt, was surprised that I had chosen orphan trains as the topic of my research paper for History Day. She told me that Mabel Newby, my great-great-grandmother, had ridden an orphan train. My grandma told me that life was difficult for Mabel's mother, so she took her two young daughters to Brace's Children's Aid Society. Mabel, who was six years old at the time, faithfully followed her older sister on the orphan train. Along with many other children, they stopped at several rural towns to be inspected by the community for adoption. Mabel's sister was one of the first children to be chosen. The heartbroken six-year-old was horrified to be separated from her sister. She cried hysterically for the rest of the journey, still in shock that she had lost her entire family in a matter of days. At the last stop before the train returned to New York, Mabel was chosen. Her new home was not a happy environment and she cried constantly. Mabel's new mother grew frustrated and sent her back to The Children's Aid Society. Finally, Mabel was placed in a happy home. She eventually learned to call her new guardians Mom and Dad. As an adult, Mabel Newby was able to reunite with her long-lost sister. The orphan train saved her from a life of poverty in New York.

After learning this information from my grandma, I suddenly realized how close my connections to history actually are! It amazed me that one of my own kin had been involved in such an important part of United States history. Mabel inspired me to work even harder on my research

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Through her History Day project, Gabrielle Russon discovered an orphan train rider with a family connection.

paper. After 2 ½ months of intense research, I had over 60 sources and was ready for competition.

Looking back on my History Day experience (I'm now a freshman in high school), I realize how fortunate I was to learn so much about my roots. All the hard work and effort I put into my paper was rewarded. I won my division in the Iowa History Day contest and earned the chance to compete at National History Day in Washington, D.C. The trip to Washington was awesome; I made friends with many of the other History Day participants from Iowa and had an opportunity to see all the famous monuments in our capital. I was in sixth grade at the time, and I competed against 89 other students, some several years older. I was ecstatic when I won fifth place and proudly have my certificate in my photo album. The most memorable thing I learned from History Day is how important history really is. Because of history, I learned a little bit more about myself and my ancestors, and I had a great time doing it, too! GF

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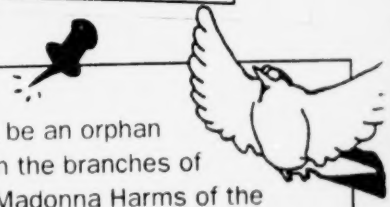
WHAT IS HISTORY DAY?

HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE?

National History Day is a fun and exciting way to learn about history. Students research a topic of their choice related to the annual theme, then create performances, exhibits, documentaries, or papers related to that subject. Students in grades 6–12 can participate in the competitive series of district, state, and national events. Younger students may complete projects for a non-competitive Youth Division event. For more information, contact the state office at (515) 281-6860 or visit:

www.NationalHistoryDay.org



Think there might be an orphan train rider hiding in the branches of your family tree? Madonna Harms of the Iowa Orphan Train Research Center can help you find out! Send her as many details as you can about the person you're investigating—relationship, date and place of birth, birth name, date of trip, name after joining a new family... You can reach Harms at 401 Broad Street, Rolfe, IA 50581-1101 or by e-mail: **wmmharms@ncn.net.**

Memories of an Orphan Train Rider

"I have no regrets..."

Gilbert Eadie rode an orphan train in 1913. He didn't keep a journal to record details of his childhood, but decades later, while corresponding with author Annette Riley Fry, Eadie finally wrote of his experiences. Here are a few excerpts from letters he wrote from December 1971 through January 1972.

My father, John Eadie, was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1856. Around 1880, with two of his brothers, Will and Hugh, they came to America to find work. As they were stone cutters by trade, they heard that there was a city where they could find plenty of work...

My father married Adelea Kelly around 1887. I was born...Nov. 12, 1902.... My mother died in July 1911 and my father in Apr. 1913.... Life in those days in the city [was] hard. My sisters had to work...my brother John was 4 1/2 years older and he skipped out in the world for himself.

Finally my sisters were to be married...so [younger brother] Walter and I [were] placed at the Brace Farm School at Valhalla, N.Y. I loved it there.

Mr. Brace would come out from the city every Saturday. We would box in the gym; then a shower and a change of clothes. Then we would go over to one of the other cottages and he would play the piano and sing and then pass out his candy treat.

One day...I overheard some men talking. I stopped when I could hear someone say: "The Eadie boys are pretty good boys. I think we should find a good home for them out West."

HOMES FOR CHILDREN

WANTED!

A Company of Homeless Children from the East will Arrive at

WAUKON, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13

AT 2:00 O'CLOCK P. M.

An Address will be Given by the Agents

ARMORY OPERA HOUSE

Waukon, Thursday, Nov. 13th, at 2:00 P. M.

Gilbert Eadie described hearing about children who were brought to the opera house in Waukon, lined up, and picked out by their prospective parents. "Walter and I were spared this humiliation as no doubt Mr. and Miss Kelly had made arrangements to take us. I heard later that they only wanted one boy but Walter and I were not to be separated," Eadie wrote.

We first stopped at Northwood, IA., overnight at a hotel. Miss Comstock had some other boys to place nearby. Walter and I were to be taken to Preston, Kansas. I was 10...

Eadie described the summer he and Walter, who were kept together, spent on the farm of Mr. and Mrs. William Wright in Kansas. They

Poster courtesy The Waukon Standard

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helped herd cows on a farm Gilbert described as "not too productive."

[The Wrights] milked six or seven cows and would churn the cream into butter.... We could not wait for Saturday to come. We would hitch the team to the two-seated surry and start out early for the county seat of Pratt where they would deliver the butter to their regular customers....

The Wrights sold their farm at the end of that summer and moved back to Pennsylvania. They did not take Gilbert and Walter with them.

So in 1914 Miss Comstock came and took Walter and I on our journey to Iowa. We stayed over night at a hotel in Waukon.... As always I got train sickness, so that night Miss Comstock got one of the boys that she had placed in a home near Waukon the year before to stay with me while she and Walter went to a movie.

The next day was the trip to the Kelly farm. At this time I began to feel like a maverick calf. Not knowing who to love or to turn to or to call Mom and Dad.

Dan Kelly and his sister Nettie who kept house for him were both unmarried. Walter and I was not adopted. Their mother as we came to call Grandma stayed with them. She told us to call them Uncle Dan and Aunt Nett.... Uncle Dan...was very particular and I inherited that quality. Also to work and save.

Many times I had to stay home from school and help with the farm work [and] to crank the old time wooden washing machine. I would go to school even after I passed the 8th grade exams, mostly in the wintertime.... I'm very glad that I kept going to school. [During] my last term in April, 1918, the teacher...asked me if I would write an essay on "How the farmer boy can help to win the War." Well to my surprise I was the winner and I got a 10 day trip all expenses paid to the Iowa State Fair at Des Moines Ia. Quite a thrill for a 15-year-old lad to ride the train alone for 225 miles. Made Uncle Dan very proud of me and he would tell everyone I was his boy.

Walter Eadie died in 1937. "At last we were to be separated, but only by the will of God." Gilbert inherited Dan Kelly's farm when "Uncle Dan" died in 1944. At the time Eadie wrote these letters, he'd lived on that farm for 58 years. "I kind of like to relax and look back and also somewhat ahead and feel rewarded with life. I have no regrets on being sent out West," he concluded. GF

Ask yourself:

❶ Think about the three train trips Gilbert Eadie described (from New York to Kansas, from Kansas to Iowa, and from home to the Iowa State Fair). How do you think he felt on each of the three trips? Similarities? Differences?

❷ Gilbert and Walter weren't separated, even though Mr. Kelly wanted to take only one boy. Do you think Miss Comstock influenced Mr. Kelly's decision? How did she help comfort the boys during difficult times?

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IOWA'S ORPHANS

This photo of children on the playground appeared in the annual report of the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home, June 30, 1897.

Photo: SHSI (I

New York was not the only state that had destitute or orphaned children. Iowa also had its own children in need of homes.

In the 19th century, wars, mass migration, economic depressions, epidemics, and the Industrial Revolution caused the number of orphaned or destitute children to rise. People migrating to Iowa and other Midwestern states in the 19th century left extended family behind. This meant there was no one to take care of children in their new home if one or both parents became ill or died.

Mothers who could not support their children alone after their husbands died often gave custody of their children to an orphanage or asylum. Sometimes, one or both parents were unfit to care for children. These children, too, would be sent to orphanages operated by churches and charities. Government assistance programs did not exist in the 19th century.

Poor, neglected, and orphaned children in Iowa lived at "poor farms," or "almshouses," in the mid-1800s. People of all ages lived in almshouses, a carryover of Old English law. Children were treated the same as adults. They often lived in overcrowded conditions and were exposed to contagious diseases. They lived with criminals, alcoholics, prostitutes, and people who were mentally ill. Children as young as 12 who were convicted of crimes were sometimes put in the state penitentiary along with adults.

Eventually, new solutions were tried which offered children more protection. **Indenture** laws were passed in 1851 in hopes of reducing the number of children in poor farms while teaching them a trade. Boys were contracted out until age 21, and girls until they married or reached age 18.

By the mid 19th century, special asylums were built for children who were blind or deaf and whose families could not care for them. This removed them from poor houses.

German-Lutherans built an orphanage in Andrew, Iowa, in 1864. Called An Asylum for Orphaned and Destitute Children, it was moved to Waverly in 1900.

Life at an orphanage was not easy. Kids often slept three or four to a straw-stuffed bunk. Boys and girls lived in separate quarters and had structured routines. Boys worked in the fields and tended animals after school and on weekends. They also

38 indenture: legal contract to work for food and a place to live.

chopped wood. Older boys had night duty guarding against fires. Girls cleaned the buildings, cooked, sewed, gardened, and did laundry before and after school.

Many Iowa children became orphans during the Civil War. Annie Turner Wittenmyer, from Keokuk, helped injured soldiers on the front line. Sometimes dying soldiers asked her to look after their children. Wittenmyer collected funds from sympathetic Iowans and, in 1864, opened a home in Farmington for children orphaned by the Civil War. Soon the home became overcrowded. In 1865, an old army barracks in Davenport was chosen as the site for the new home. The Farmington home was closed, and the children were transferred to the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home in Davenport.

Other soldiers' orphans' homes sprang up in Cedar Falls and Glenwood, Iowa. But, by 1876, these homes were closed and the orphans transferred to Davenport. Fewer kids were becoming orphans because of war, and attitudes changed regarding how best to care for orphaned and destitute children.

The Crittenton Home in Sioux City and the Hillcrest Baby Fold in Dubuque were founded in 1896 to address the problem of children being born to unmarried parents.

Two girls, Katie and Mary, at an orphanage in Dubuque in 1870

Photo: SHSI

"Both had residential facilities to house pregnant women, medical facilities, and a nursery," said Nancylee Ziese, who served as coordinator of adoption at Hillcrest Family Services in Dubuque. "The two facilities grew out of the changing attitude that the best place for children was in a foster home or permanent adoption," Ziese explained. "Research was showing infants needed to have a parental bond soon after birth."

By 1965, foster care was seen as the best way to offer children stability. Many orphanages were converted to residential treatment facilities for troubled children. Today, places like the Annie Wittenmyer Home in Davenport, now called The Wittenmyer Youth Center, care for children with behavior disorders. Others, such as Glenwood State Hospital School, care for children with mental and physical handicaps. There are no orphanages in Iowa today.

—By Susanne Leibold

Photo: Courtesy Brenwood Lutheran Children's Home

This building housed the Evangelical Lutheran Orphan's Home in Waverly. It was constructed in 1900 to replace the orphanage in Andrew, Iowa.

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The Boy With Two Names

Howard Tressider was a young man with a wife, two young daughters, and a new job as a rural mail carrier in Clarion, Iowa. But he still didn't know who he was. He was haunted by flashbacks he could not explain. He remembered a train clattering along the countryside, foggy images of women in white, and a farmer who gave him and other children apples. He had been called Howard for as far back as he could remember, but somehow he thought he had once been called by another name.

As a child he had doubted that William and Martha Tressider were his real parents. They, however, insisted he was their child and that anything he thought he remembered was just his imagination. He liked school, but attended only when there was no farm work to do. When he went to school, kids teased him about his oversized boots. At home, if he disobeyed or complained, he was beaten. "When we went to church my father said if anyone asked about my bruises to say I'd fallen down the steps," he later said. "They just got me to work." Howard was eager to leave home and make his own way. He felt pride in doing hard work for a wage.

When Martha Tressider died, Howard found a placing out agreement from an orphanage. He wasn't dreaming after all. His real name was Ira Carrell.

Ira was 33 when, in August 1923, he finally met the father who had given him away. The placing out document and Ira's diligent search for the truth finally brought the two together. At last, Ira knew the story of his life. He learned that his birth mother, Sara, had died when he was three. Sherman Carrell then married a woman who already had two daughters. Two more children were born to the couple. His stepmother treated Ira harshly, and Sherman, fearing for his son's welfare, took the advice of a friend and sent Ira to an orphanage. The friend explained that thousands of children were being shipped all over the country on "orphan trains" and assured Sherman that he could get his son back whenever he chose. In February 1896, Sherman put 5-year-old Ira on a train with a name tag pinned to his coat. Ira rode alone from Charleston, Illinois, to an orphanage in Chicago. On January 12, 1897, Ira was placed out to the Tressiders, who farmed near White Oak Springs, Wisconsin. They renamed their new foster son Howard Edward.

Later, when Sherman tried to find Ira, orphanage staff remembered the boy, but a fire at the orphanage destroyed records of where he'd been sent.

This portrait of Ira and his family was taken in 1923. "Dad always felt as though something was missing in his life," said his daughter, Verlene McOllough of Clarion. "His experiences helped me appreciate my own children and inspired me to make our home the best, safest place I could."

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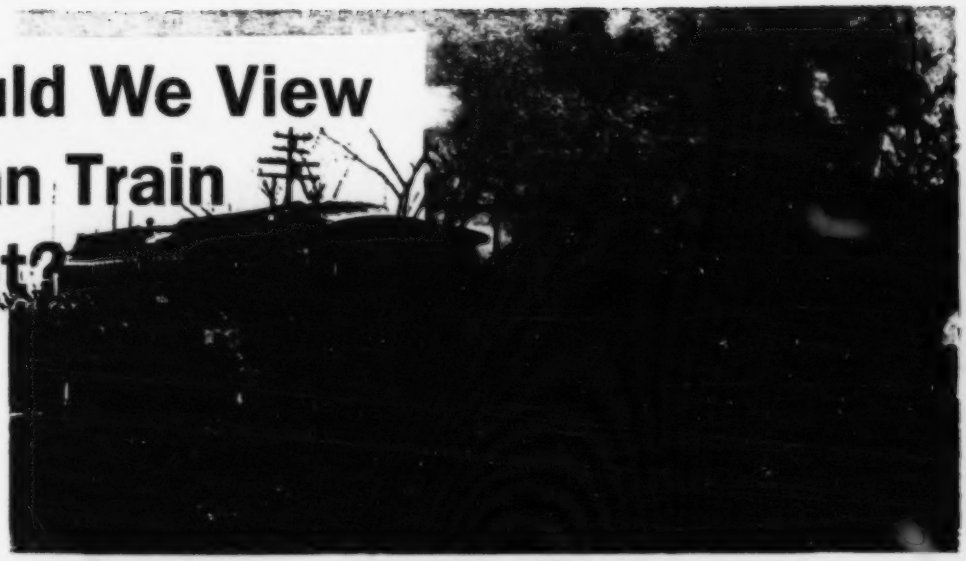
How Should We View the Orphan Train Movement?



By Katherine House

Many people who read about orphan trains today are shocked that children were removed from everything that was familiar to them and sent to live with total strangers. But to understand the orphan train movement, we must study the era in which it occurred. At the time, welfare and other services for the poor were very limited.

The concept of foster parents—people who agreed to raise someone else's children—was virtually unknown. Before the orphan train movement, parents who could not afford to raise their children often indentured them to someone else to work and learn a trade in exchange for room and board. But the indenture system was nearly eliminated in some areas when immigrants agreed to work under poor conditions for little pay.

Victor Remer, archivist for The Children's Aid Society in New York, says the movement "took children from impossible circumstances—great poverty, abuse, delinquency—kids just managing to stay alive." For most of them, their new home was a "great experience," he says.

"The orphan trains were needed at the time they happened," according to D. Bruce Ayler, son of an orphan train rider. "They were not the best answer, but they were the first attempts at finding a practical system...The trains gave the children a fighting chance to grow up."

Today, child psychologists and social workers understand how traumatic it is to separate children from parents and siblings. They work hard to keep children with birth parents or siblings, or at least with local foster parents. Ayler explains, "Would the riders prefer to go back to the old system? No! They realize that the new system is not perfect—that it needs fixing—but it is better than breaking up families."

Each generation tries to solve the problems of orphaned and neglected children the best they can. Unfortunately, some children today face the same problems as the orphan train riders. Abandoned babies and homeless families need help. Parents addicted to drugs and alcohol are unable to care for children. This means social workers, politicians and others are trying to answer some of the same questions Charles Loring Brace and 19th-century Americans faced: When and why should a child be removed from a birth parent? How should foster parents be selected? Should adopted children be given information about their birth families? If so, when?

There are no easy answers.

Photo: SHSI (Iowa City)

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